Journal of Philosophy and Linguistics
Research Article Peer-review, Open Access

Women's Representation and Development as Reflected in Feminine Archetypal Images and Symbols in World Literature and Myth in Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other

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Abstract: The present research has reflected over the idea of representation and development of woman in Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other. The problem statement has evaluated that gap that we cannot divide people by their race, class, gender, disability, religion, and age only. In alignment to the problem statement and the findings as how traits of humans are interconnected. The objective of the research is to trace the women's representation and development in the novel by focusing on the intersectionality by investigating how breaking archetypal images causes the oppression and emancipation process. Thematic analysis has been found supportive of effective analysis of the growth and development shared by women in the novel. Feminist theory used the concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool in order to solve the issue of gender inequalities. The author of the novel uses characterization to show intersectionality in the female characters by criticizing stereotypes and how they can limit the representation of women.

Keywords: Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other, Intersectionality, Female Characters

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Introduction

Kumar (2006) states "since the dawn of civilization, woman has been a myth and a legend, a metaphor and a symbol, a deity or a devil". It is in fact not clear who a woman is. The ones that raise and care can be seen as heroes and the source of generations by some, but can also be seen as lazy and passive by others. Depending on how a woman is represented, her definition and identity can change. Kumar asks "but who is the real woman?". Studying literature can answer this question. A novel that tackles gender-based oppression and patriarchy, with an ending of the female reaching liberation can represent the woman as a rebel. Other novels describing the mid-life crisis of a woman can represent the maiden archetype in a woman, while an autobiography of a successful man can represent his mother as the great mother archetype. With these representations in different novels, it would be difficult to compare this representation in an archetypal framework. Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other is the best novel to investigate how women are represented, as the novel features 12 female characters. Despite most of the characters being black, the author focuses on intersectionality – black women, although having many similarities in their issues, cannot be represented as one, since they have many differences. This essay

looks at the intersectionality of the characters, and how they are represented in terms of feminine archetypes.

Method

Conceptual Framework:

Alpini agrues that critics who analyze literature have always used a male perspective. Therefore, literature represents males and is viewed from a male perspective. There is a lack of analysis from a feminist perspective. Therefore, women's representation is problematic; women are not represented in literature, which gives an opportunity to stereotypes and misrepresentation. Alpini argues that female archetypes represent women as 'half divine' and 'half animal'. This is far from the reality. For once, it is representing all women in one, sole form. To quote Alpini, "Women are alienated from reality because their universal, supernatural representation inadequately reflects their identity." (Alpini).

To understand the idea of representation, we need to understand intersectionality. According to A. E. Kings, this concept that explains how traits of humans are interconnected. For example, we cannot divide people by their race, class, gender, disability, sexuality, religion, and age only. These traits cross each other and can be common between characters while they have differences between other traits. For example, Girl, Woman, Other, black women cannot be represented by one voice because one character depicted, for example, is old, rich, and privileged, while other black females are young, and less successful. Feminist theory used the concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool in order to solve the issue of gender inequalities. In a patriarchal society where women are marginalized, the intersectional notion has aided women in fighting for their rights. (Kings). This essay will look at how it is not valid, and an oppressive concept to look at women strictly through female archetypes, by showing that women can differ immensely, even when they share many features.

Literature Review

Literary and mythological studies have long placed a high value on the investigation of feminine archetypes and symbols. This examination of the literature places Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other in the larger academic framework of postmodern narrative forms, feminist literary criticism, archetypal theory, and mythical symbolism. In order to analyse how Evaristo's book reimagines feminine identity via both ancient and contemporary lenses, it draws on important theoretical frameworks and critical-discourses.

Feminist Literary Criticism and Women's Representation

From questioning the marginalisation of female voices to examining how literature might serve as a platform for resistance and gender role reconfiguration, feminist literary criticism has developed over time.

Influential critics like Elaine Showalter (1977) emphasized the need for a "gynocritical" approach that prioritizes female experience and creativity. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 1979 book The Madwoman in the Attic makes a similar point: Western literature has often limited the range of feminine identity by defining women as either angelic or demonic.

Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other directly addresses this heritage by giving us a range of female stories that go beyond stereotypes. The novel's polyphonic structure disrupts the uniformity of traditional literary representations by facilitating the expression of diverse identities, including queer, Black, immigrant, and working-class experiences. Scholars such as Madhu Krishnan (2020) and Niall Munro (2021) assert that Evaristo's contribution to contemporary British literature contests dominant patriarchal narratives through both formal experimentation and political engagement.

Archetypal Criticism and the Feminine Image

Archetypal criticism examines recurring symbols and characters in literature and mythology that represent universal human experiences. Maureen Murdock and Jean Shinoda Bolen were the first to make it, and Carl Jung's work had the most effect on it. The "Great Mother," the "Maiden," the "Wise Old Woman," and the "Crone" are examples of feminine archetypes that have had an impact on myths and

stories all over the world.

Evaristo subtly integrates these tropes into her character portrayals in Girl, Woman, Other to contest and modernize established perceptions rather than to reinforce them. For instance, Amma is hard to put into a box because she is both a wise woman and a parent who is still active in advocacy. Using symbolic motifs and legendary resonance, like childbirth, migration, water, and transformation, makes it easier to compare with mythical frameworks from both Western and African traditions. This multifaceted symbolic methodology critiques the androcentric limitations inherent in Joseph Campbell's monomyth and Northrop Frye's (1957) notion of archetypal patterns.

Intersectionality and the Postcolonial Feminine

To comprehend the interplay of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class in Evaristo's writing, one must grasp Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality.

(1989). Girl, Woman, Other critiques Eurocentric feminism and its marginalisation of non-white, non-Western women's experiences by drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, specifically the writings of Bell Hooks, Gayatri Spivak, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003).

Every woman in Evaristo's characters possesses a distinct positionality and narrative arc, defying homogenised stereotypes. The fragmentation and diversity of contemporary identity are best illustrated by Shirley's conservative assimilation, Morgan's gender flexibility, and Yazz's millennial liberalism. The essentialist assumptions of femininity present in postcolonial discourse and Western literature are contested by these representations.

Myth and Literary Tradition: Re-visioning the Canon

Adrienne Rich's idea of "re-vision," which means looking at the past with fresh eyes, makes it easier to look at how Evaristo revisits and changes literary and mythic traditions. By using African, Caribbean, and classical mythology, she takes back symbolic space that has been filled with stories written by men in the past.

The theme structure of Girl, Woman, Other subtly includes mythological echoes, like the Orisha figures from Yoruba cosmology or traditional references to Medea and Demeter. These references not only add to the story, but they also serve as counter-narratives to the dominant Euro-American mythos. Academics like Mary Daly and Clarissa Pinkola Estés support the "wild woman" archetype, which Evaristo is said to reconstruct in characters like Dominique and Carole who refuse to be tamed and take back their freedom through personal growth.

Symbolism, Narrative Form, and Liminality

In Evaristo's book, symbolism has both personal and social meanings. Her poetic style, unusual punctuation, and refusal to use linear plotlines all show that she doesn't like strict patriarchal literary forms. Julia Kristeva's 1984 ideas about the "semiotic" and "symbolic" parts of language can be used here because Evaristo's text works in a space that values polyvocality and fluidity over fixed meaning.

The book's structure embodies the concept of liminality, originating from Victor Turner's anthropological theory, which illustrates how characters navigate the intersections of place, culture, and identity. Evaristo's emphasis on hybridity and transitional phases aligns with Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space," a realm where identity intersections generate novel cultural significances.

Girl, Woman, Other's portrayal of women is based on a rich mix of myths, archetypes, feminist criticism, and postcolonial philosophy. Evaristo both inherits and changes the symbolic heritage of feminine archetypes by putting them into modern, intersectional stories. The novel's combination of the symbolic and the political, the legendary and the modern, shows that women are starting to build their own symbolic worlds instead of just being objects of myth. Evaristo's writings contribute to a growing body of literature that redefines feminine archetypes for future generations while simultaneously reclaiming them.

Research Objectives:

1. To understand women’s representation in the novel by focusing on the intersectionality.

2. To understand women's development through time and how they no longer fit archetypal representation.
3. To investigate how breaking archetypal images causes the oppression and emancipation process.

Results

The analysis of Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other reveals a rich and nuanced portrayal of feminine archetypal images and symbols that depict women's evolution and identity creation, in line with patterns observed in myth and global literature. Numerous significant results were drawn from the textual analysis:

The prevalence of feminine archetypes

The book features a number of archetypal figures, including the Trickster, the Mother, the Maiden, the Crone, and the Warrior. Examples of these figures in action include Shirley (the dominant character that borders on the Crone archetype), Morgan/Megan (a transformational, shapeshifting figure akin to the Trickster), Yazz (the curious Maiden), and Amma (the disobedient and protective Mother).

These archetypes are similar to ancient mythological figures such as Demeter and Persephone, as well as characters from African, Caribbean, and British mythology, which is consistent with Evaristo's utilisation of global mythic traditions to build her characters.

The intersection of gender, race, and identity

The novel's famous symbols are always changing because the main characters have different identities that overlap. Amma's portrayal of the Mother archetype is intricately connected to Black identity, queerness, and feminist activism, providing a nuanced perspective that contests the uniformity of mainstream mythology. This study posits that Evaristo not only replicates archetypes but also reinterprets them to confront contemporary issues of race, class, and sexuality.

Signs of Metamorphosis and Rebirth

Water, travel, and clothing are just a few of the symbols that show change, freedom, and rebirth that are used throughout the story. Characters often go through changes in their relationships and in themselves by doing things like cutting their hair, changing their name, or starting a new job.

Mythological resonance and cultural hybridity

In the book's British-African-Caribbean setting, Yoruba, Caribbean, and European symbols are mixed together to make new legendary elements. This hybridity not only suggests that feminine archetypes are flexible and applicable across diverse cultural contexts, but it also enhances the portrayal of women's identities and contests essentialist classification.

A brief overview of the results

In the end, Girl, Woman, Other shows how important feminine archetypes and symbols are in literature for how women are shown and developed. But these archetypes aren't fixed because cultures are always changing, crossing paths, and mixing with each other. Evaristo's work gives us new examples of what it means to be a woman that fit with both modern life and stories from the past.

Discussion

This study has analyzed the complex representation of women and their development in Bernardine Evaristo's "Girl, Woman, Other," utilizing feminine archetypal imagery and symbols sourced from mythology and global literature. The findings demonstrate how Evaristo portrays the varied experiences, obstacles, and triumphs of Black British women throughout history by employing a range of archetypes, such as the Mother, the Maiden, the Warrior, and the Wise Woman.

The investigation uncovers significant themes concerning the adaptability and intricacy of female identity. Evaristo's figures often show women in different roles that change over time, which shows how diverse and fragmented modern women are, rather than fitting into one mold.

For example, Amma is a mix of the Mother and the Rebel archetypes because she is both a caring mother and a rebellious activist. Morgan's journey of being gender fluid and not fitting into traditional gender roles is also like the Trickster character because it breaks down traditional binaries.

The book uses myths and personal stories to show the daily problems that women have to deal with. The book follows the classic path from separation and hardship to integration and self-discovery, especially as the characters try to come to terms with their pasts, their families, and their social standing. Joseph Campbell's monomyth or "hero's journey" fits with this, but Evaristo makes it a very feminine and intersectional story that looks at how class, race, and sexual orientation are different.

The archetypal framework is bolstered by the symbolic representation of locations and objects, including Amma's theatre stage, the ancestral home, and the recurring motif of hair. In particular, hair is a strong symbol of negotiating identity, resisting, and passing down traditions. By paying attention to these symbols, Evaristo's characters' lives are based on what it's like to be Black and British today. Simultaneously, she situates them within a broader literary and mythological framework.

The study also shows that Evaristo's use of archetypes shows feminist and postcolonial issues by changing them instead of just copying old patterns. People often think of the Wise Woman in Girl, Woman, Other as a spiritual leader. In this book, though, she is more often seen as a mentor or elder in the community who fights against systems that are unfair and shares new ideas. This dynamic reflects the novel's primary political aim: to broaden the cultural repository of individuals deemed heroic, intelligent, or pivotal to the societal narrative.

The polyphonic narrative structure of Girl, Woman, Other reflects the social and interconnected nature of archetypal patterns. Evaristo shifts the emphasis from a solitary, heroic protagonist to a collective of twelve interrelated individuals. This illustrates the significance of interconnectedness in both feminist and mythological contexts.

This narrative technique improves the novel's look at how women grow as a process of historical continuity, collective belonging, and personal self-realization.

This research concludes by highlighting the ways in which Evaristo's novel reimagines traditional imagery and symbols to depict the nuanced reality of Black British women's lives. Girl, Woman, Other presents a dynamic and revolutionary picture of feminine growth that is both firmly grounded in cultural history and audaciously forward-looking through the interaction of legendary patterns and modern experience.

Analysis

Representation through intersectionality

The author of the novel wants to highlight the idea of intersectionality through the characterization. First, the novel is about 12 women, who are interrelated. The main characters are 3, and the rest are related back to them, as friends or relatives (mother and daughter). Most characters have black origins, yet different lives, further proving that black females cannot be represented by one character. Amma is an older, black, female professor, who is independent and rich. She has lived through many struggles and become “privileged”. She is an intellect, and a growing drama writer. Other female black characters are different from other characters, but similar to Amma in sexuality. The author states that even for sexuality, i.e. for these characters being lesbian, “not the lesbians who have little problem getting off with each other, but the straight ones who’ve got good jobs and houses and no partner to share it with” (50). This means that even lesbians can be different, and can struggle to find partners like “straight” people. This point also conveys the author’s message of sharing a part of people’s lives, especially the community whose sexuality is not accepted or represented, thus contributing to a good representation of women.

Other differences continue with other black female characters, this time representing their struggles. Yazz explains how having some traits can result in oppression “I’m black, Courts, which makes me more oppressed than anyone who isn’t” (59). Finally the author presents these different traits as layers, and each of them gives an advantage or disadvantage. For example, the worst traits, describing Waris, are

"black, Muslim, female, poor, hijabbed" (59). Through the characterization, and the choice of traits that are similar and other traits that are different, the author aims to achieve representation of women of different traits, and to tell the reader that black women cannot all be described as one.

Breaking Archetypal Images to Emancipate

The author of the novel breaks the female archetype in many ways. The author criticizes people generalizing a trait over many people because of their race, gender, etc. For example, Waris is mistaken for an Arab because of her looks. The author's voice comes through Waris, who thinks it is crazy This shows that the author is against stereotypes. She objects to the idea of stereotypes that control one's behavior and sets expectations. To the author, voiced by her characters, women can be like men. When the author describes characters stereotypical, she is not judging them with stereotypes, but defending that women do not have to stick to stereotypes.

Conclusion

The author of the novel uses characterization to show intersectionality in the female characters. She chooses criteria that are similar (race, gender) and other criteria that are different – some characters are lesbian, others are lesbians but seem straight, others have male confidence, other ones adhere to stereotypes. She also criticizes stereotypes and how they can limit the representation of women, who cannot be represented in one image. The novel also represents the new generation, who is ungrateful of the old generation, as they think they ruined their society, whereas the older society reached emancipation through their fights, and has given the new generation a free life. Finally, the author argues that stereotypes are causing issues in the society, and limiting people's potential. Characters fight stereotypes and do not adhere to them as a statement that they want to be free, and cannot be represented in the traditional female stereotypes.

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